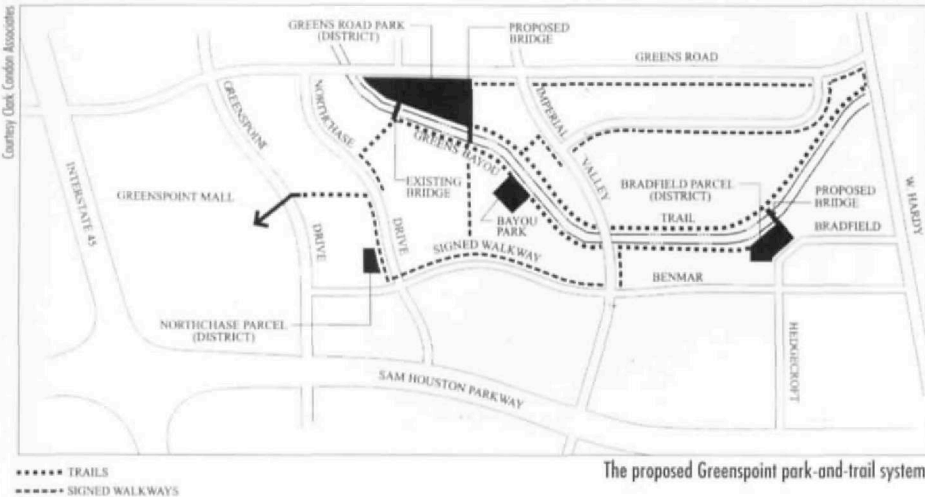




The Greening of Greenspoint



MANY ARCHITECTS DREAM of replacing urban blight with attractive green space. Clark Condon Associates realized this dream several years ago in the Greenspoint area, transforming acres of dilapidated apartments into two attractive parks linked by trails along Greens Bayou. Better still, the project continues to add green space with more parks and trails under development.

Greenspoint's decline began in 1976 after the City of Houston annexed the area near Intercontinental Airport — which before annexation had been located 15 miles north of Houston. With the nearest city police station almost ten miles away, crime surged — and grew even worse in the 1980s, when the oil market's

crash further wounded the area's oil industry and airport-dependent economy.

Community leaders hoping to reverse Greenspoint's decline focused on an 11-acre tract of urban blight. Vagrants occupied some of the decayed, partially burned and flooded houses. The Greater Greenspoint Management District worked with the City of Houston to have the buildings declared dangerous and destroyed. After they were razed, the tract was safe and clean — but it was only an empty field, not a full-fledged park.

In the early 1990s, the district retained Sheila Condon, principal with landscape architects Clark Condon Associates, to create a master plan for

two parks: Thomas R. Wussow Park, on those 11 acres, and CityView Park (2.5 acres). Both patches of former blight, the two parks lay just a half mile apart and could be connected by paths.

According to Condon, the plan needed to include “a place for people of all ages, from little toddlers to senior citizens.” She proposed picnic areas, jogging and bike paths, play areas for children, ball fields, meeting areas, and quiet spaces.

For years, the management district searched for money to implement the plan. In 1998, the District created a Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone to provide financial incentives to qualified developers for including public amenities, such as parks, in their projects. The Archon Group, a developer rehabilitating approximately 5,000 apartments in the area, was keenly interested in improving the neighborhood and, with the incentives, launched the project.

When the parks officially opened on May 2, 2002, they mirrored the master plan developed years before. “It's nice that the design stood the test of time,” notes Condon.

The parks quickly proved popular with Greenspoint's 75,000 residents. Wussow Park offers a water-spray area and playground for children. At the

larger park, residents frequently rent the multi-purpose ball field (designed for soccer or baseball), volleyball courts, or one of the many pavilions dotting the two parks. CityView Park, which sports an attractive trellis, has even been leased for wedding receptions.

Pleased, the Greater Greenspoint Management District hired Clark Condon Associates to design two more parks: one on nine acres along Greens Bayou at Ella Boulevard and Greens Road, and another on four acres near the Sam Houston Parkway and Hardy Toll Road. The two parks remain in the design phase. The management district has arranged funding for the new parks, and recently it obtained a \$2.4 million grant from the Texas Department of Transportation to develop a trail system linking all four parks.

Whenever Condon drives by the CityView and Wussow parks, she revels in the sight of people actively enjoying the green space. Jack Drake, president of the Greater Greenspoint Management District, is proud of the park project. “It has changed the lives of those who work and live in the Greenspoint area,” he says. “It has enhanced their quality of life. What greater reward could you have as a board or staff member of the district than creating that?” — *Janet H. Moore*

Preservation Gets Hip

HOUSTON MOD AIMS TO SAVE HOUSTON'S RECENT HISTORY

“WHEN PEOPLE THINK PRESERVATION, they think stuffy Victorians,” says Karen Lantz, a founding member of Houston Mod. “We want them to think hip and cool.”

Lantz, like the other architects, designers, and enthusiasts who started the group this summer, is passionate about the simplicity and experimentation of modern design. While Mod members value preserving buildings from all eras, they say post-war architecture is especially important to a city as modern as Houston — not that the city itself always recognizes this.

“Houston's heyday was the Astrodome,” says Lantz. “We were Space City, an international city, cutting-edge. Then we make a baseball stadium

that's all nostalgic, of an era that never even happened in Houston.”

The group hosted its first event, a talk by William F. Stern, FAIA of Stern and Bucek Architects, on August 21 at the Lawndale Art Center. A reception before the event was sponsored by Ray + Hollington Architects. In his lecture, Stern addressed the value of modern architecture in Houston and described the challenges associated with preserving these buildings, including asbestos abatement and working with materials such as glass, steel, and concrete.

Stern laments the era's lost buildings, from Allen Parkway Village to the Great Southern Life building on Buffalo Speedway. Others remain in peril: the

Astrodome, the Prudential Building on Holcombe, and numerous residential homes, which are often the most difficult to save. But he is hopeful Houston Mod can stop the carnage: “If you have a group of people beating the drum, you'll have people look differently at these buildings.”

While Houston Mod wants to attract a diverse group, founding member and architecture enthusiast Michael Brichford, 32, says the organization hopes the cause will especially appeal to younger people, who may be more open to the experimental approaches of the time. Brichford says he recently showed his own parents a Memorial Bend home from the 1950s with a butterfly roof. “They absolutely hated it,” he laughs.

Still, Brichford and other Mod members hope that Baby Boomers and older people will care about these buildings — perhaps out of nostalgia, or because they have personal memories associated with the buildings.

The group's web site, www.houstonmod.org, provides an interactive tour of examples of modern architecture in Houston. Highlights include Phillis Wheatley Senior High School, designed in 1950 by MacKie & Kamrath, and the Bank of Houston building by Wilson, Morris, Crain & Anderson, which was erected in 1967.

The web site also offers visitors an opportunity to donate money to the organization online through PayPal, and all givers are designated as something groovier than just a “supporter.” Supporters who donate \$10 will be able to pronounce themselves “minimalists,” while those who shell out \$65 will be deemed “hipsters.”

It seems that by not taking themselves too seriously, HoustonMod hopes to get its city serious about historic preservation.

“We like to refer to ourselves as the Mod Squad,” says Lantz.

— *Jennifer Mathieu*